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SUBJECT: INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATION ELECTS NEW HEAD

1. Summary: The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) on December 23 elected Luis Macas president of the organization, a post he previously held twice. Macas, a former Minister of Agriculture and an ethnic Saraguro indian from the south of the country, will lead the organization until 2007 and replaces Leonidas Iza. Postulated by the highlands-based ECUARUNARI and supported by the coastal CONAICE organization, Macas is expected to maintain distance from the Gutierrez administration and its Minister of Social Welfare, indigenous leader Antonio Vargas. Pro-government Amazonian indigenous were accused of attempting to disrupt the Congress as well as of threatening indigenous leaders. Biographical information is included in paragraph 10. End Summary.

Macas Wins, Santi Offers Support

2. Macas, with 300 votes, defeated Marlon Santi, the candidate of the Amazonian indigenous federation CONFENIAE, who received 181 votes, at the CONAIE congress on December 23. Macas is considered to be part of the older generation of indigenous leaders, with a great deal of experience within the indigenous movement. After the vote, Santi expressed his support for Macas, quelling fears of further division within the organization. Santiago de la Cruz, a coastal Chachi indian and member of the CONAICE, was elected vice-president. Amazonians will hold posts in the International Relations and Natural Resources divisions.

3. According to press reports, as a candidate, Macas said his priority would be the creation of a plurinational state and he emphasizes the process of "interculturality," including bilingual intercultural education. Macas believes the country should look for alternatives to the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. Macas pledged to work closely with the base organizations to strengthen currently weak ties, as displayed by the disappointing indigenous anti-government mobilizations earlier this year. Macas has said he will not enter into dialogue with the current government.

Mobilizations and Other Topics Discussed

4. A total of 1070 delegates attended the congress including regional delegates from 30 indigenous nationalities and domestic and international observers. The congress featured debates on the current political situation, GoE energy policy, education, indigenous nationalities, and statute reform. On December 22, CONAIE leaders discussed a future mobilization to protest Congress' dismantling of the Supreme Court and the government's referendum. CONAIE leaders feel this call for mobilization will have a greater response than the two Leonidas Iza organized earlier this year.

Divisive Elements Removed From Congress

5. On December 20, Jose Quenama of CONFENIAE was expelled from the congress for promoting violence and for his ties to Antonio Vargas. Fifty Quenama supporters tried to get Quenama's name on the ballot for president despite his not having support from the bases. According to the CONAIE website, the group then removed cables from computers to impede registration for the congress. Representatives of six of the ten nationalities within CONFENIAE voted to remove Quenama from CONFENIAE which he previously headed. Many leaders of the Cofan, Siona, and Secoya nationalities left the congress, in support of Quenama.

6. CONAIE members also accused Quenama of aiding the government's effort of creating divisions within the organization. On December 23, a small group of Quenama supporters met in Quito to create a CONAIE 2, with support from the government. Bolivar Gonzalez, Undersecretary for Social Welfare and the primary advisor to Minister Antonio Vargas, also made a statement concerning rebuilding CONAIE. According to the press, Quenama said his supporters reject Macas' victory as they feel the electoral process was illegal, since Quenama was not allowed to participate as a candidate for the presidency. Quenama said Macas will not be allowed to travel to Amazonian territory.

Candidates Allegedly Receive Death Threats

17. On December 20, Leonidas Iza, the CONAIE's then-president, accused the government of a campaign of intimidation against indigenous leaders. Iza said that many leaders had received threats over the telephone. Santi, the CONFENIAE candidate, said to the press that he received anonymous phone calls on December 21 and 22 threatening that if he were elected CONAIE president, he would be dead within 24 hours. Santi said his lawyers planned to file a complaint with the OAS' Inter-american Commission on Human Rights, accusing the government of ordering the threats. According to the press, Santi also claimed Quenama offered him \$25,000 in order to support the latter's candidacy.

CONAIE Issues Manifesto

18. During the congress, CONAIE issued a manifesto, published on its website, expressing its rejection of the alleged intentions of the government, the PRE party, the PRIAN party, and the U.S. "to annihilate and destroy all the social and popular organizations in the country." CONAIE accused the "treasonous and dictatorial government of Lucio Gutierrez, in complicity with a reduced group of opportunist followers of Antonio Vargas and Jose Quenama bought by the government, of attempting to boycott the congress and create a parallel congress." CONAIE called on the Ecuadorian people to stay alert to the GoE's increasing dictatorial bent.

Comment

19. Macas stood out as a strong candidate during the congress and, with the support of his challenger Santi, seems to enjoy a certain legitimacy. Pro-government indigenous, on the other hand, were discredited by the majority of CONAIE members and are increasingly isolated. They will no doubt continue to attempt to organize, but their reputation seems to have been tarnished. Macas appears confident that he will have greater success mobilizing the indigenous, and a future attempt to organize a protest of the recent dismantling of the Supreme Court is possible. We will attempt to reach out to Macas and open lines of communication with the Embassy. Macas so far does not seem to spew as much anti-U.S. rhetoric as his predecessor Iza; however, CONAIE's latest manifesto expresses great suspicion of the U.S. End Comment.

Bio information

110. Luis Macas, a member of the Saraguro ethnicity (part of the Quichua group), was born on June 3, 1950 in Saraguro, Loja province. Macas studied anthropology at Quito's Catholic University, jurisprudence at the Central University, and linguistics, also at Quito's Catholic University. In 1978, Macas was part of a group of 12 indigenous leaders who sought a meeting of representatives from Ecuador's three regions: Sierra, Amazon, and Coast. This meeting was not held until 1980, after the fall of the dictatorship, and was a first step towards the first CONAIE congress held in Quito in 1986. In 1986, Macas became head of communications for CONAIE and released its first newspaper, "Indian Nationalities." In 1988 he became vice-president and in 1990 became president of the organization. Macas was reelected president from 1993-1996. In 1996, he became a Congressional deputy and worked to promote the passage of the Indigenous Nationalities Law and the creation of the Indigenous Fund. In 2003, he held the post of Minister of Agriculture during Pachakutik's alliance with Gutierrez' government. Currently he serves as acting rector of the Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Pueblos "Amawta Wasi" and is director of the Scientific Institute of Indigenous Cultures, posts which he is expected to relinquish in order to head CONAIE.
KENNEY